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**To the
Company of the
Daughters of Charity**

My Hopes for the Company of the Daughters of Charity¹

Over the past year many Daughters of Charity have asked me to express my hopes for the Company, as I did a year ago for the Congregation of the Mission. I have hesitated for a very obvious reason: I am not a Daughter of Charity. I have never lived your life, even if at times I have shared in your joys and your sorrows. But I speak today because you, through your Constitutions, have asked me to be the Superior General of your Company. I also speak because I love the Company of the Daughters of Charity deeply. Some of the best women I have ever known live in your midst. With the freedom of one who loves, therefore, I will throw caution to the wind and will speak to you from the heart, trusting in your understanding.

What I express to you today is not a list of "impossible dreams." It is a list of hopes. I think that all of them are realizable, though surely with some difficulty.

1. I hope that the international character of the Daughters of Charity will be deepened.

The Company was already international in the time of Saint Vincent. He sent Sisters to Poland. As you know he sent Missionaries to Algeria, Madagascar, Poland, Italy, Ireland, Scotland, and also dreamed of the Indies, of Canada, of China. But, in reality, the Church has become a "world Church" only in the twentieth century. Vatican II, as Karl Rahner points out, is really the first "world Council."² Likewise, it is only in the twentieth century that the Daughters of Charity have become a worldwide Company with provinces on all the continents and on the pacific islands.

In this regard, a remarkable shift has taken place in the latter part of

1. Talk to the Visitatrixes and Regional Superiors of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, September 21, 1994.

2. K. Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations XX*, 90-102; cf. also "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future" in *Theological Investigations XX*, 103-14.

the twentieth century. Since 1970, for the first time in history, more than fifty percent of the world's Catholics are living in the southern hemisphere.³ Walbert Bühlmann calls this the "coming of the third Church."⁴

In order to realize this hope, I want to encourage every Sister and every province to have a global awareness. Let me mention three signs that will witness to global awareness in the Company.

A first, concrete sign is the ability to respond to emergencies. Actually, many Daughters of Charity have been heroic in this regard in places like Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. Do not let provincial ties and provincial needs hold you back. When the needs of the Church are greater elsewhere, go with liberty.

A second sign of the international character of the Company, and of global awareness, is solidarity among the provinces. I urge you to cooperate with one another. This is already taking place through national and regional meetings of Visitatrixes, but I especially want to encourage you to cooperate in regard to the formation of candidates and in regard to assistance to poorer provinces. There are some things we can do together that we cannot do separately. Those of us who are better off materially can surely be of great assistance to those who have less.

Thirdly, a healthy sign of global awareness in the Company will be the presence of sisters from all the continents, with their varied races, here in the General Curia. An international Company needs ties between the center and the provinces. As the provinces of the "Third Church" grow, good communication with the center will be an utter necessity.

2. That its missionary character be highlighted.

The Mother General has already addressed this subject in her letter of January 6, 1994. This means that the Company will be mobile, flexible, responsive to the needs of the worldwide Church.

When the Company was founded, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise scattered tiny seeds—parish sodalities, so to speak—throughout France and then in Poland. Today the Company, by God's blessing, is a huge tree under whose branches the poor in eighty-four countries take shelter. Some of its most fruitful branches are in distant lands.

I pose this question: Could every province of the Daughters of Charity

3. W. Bühlmann, *The Church of the Future* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986) 4-5.

4. Cf. W. Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Slough, England: St. Pauls, 1976).

take on the responsibility for a mission outside its own territory? Could the Company become missionary not just territorially, but in the heart and will of its members, showing great flexibility in moving to wherever the needs of the poor cry out, both within one's province and outside?

One of the signs that the Company is filled with a missionary spirit will be the willingness to relinquish works that are well-established but which others can carry on, in order to free sisters for more pressing needs that others are unwilling or unable to meet.

3. That there be a more concrete collaboration with lay people, especially the young.

Pope John Paul II has often spoken of the generosity and the yearnings of young people. Echoing the words of Vatican II,⁵ he calls young people "the hope of the Church."⁶ He encourages us to reach out to them, to offer them a challenge. My predecessor, Fr. McCullen, repeated this theme several times in his addresses. I want to reaffirm it today.

It is not easy to work with young people. They ask challenging questions. Their ways seem different. Sometimes they appear to lack the discipline and the permanence of commitment that older people expect from others.

But young people hold the key to the future. They will be the Church of tomorrow. They are the twenty-first century's evangelizers of the poor. The inevitable, universal fact of human existence is that each of us passes on. We must, therefore, hand on the future to the young.

I challenge every province, even every work if possible, to reach out to young people. Involve them especially in the service of the poor. Involve them in your prayer and your reflection on the gospels. Involve them in some form of community living. All these things—service, prayer, community—are among the deepest aspirations of young people.

Today my hope is that you reach out to the young, wherever you labor. Share with them your wonderful charism. The strength and the charm of youth, Pope Paul VI said at the end of Vatican II, is "the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself, and to set out again for new conquests."⁷

5. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 2.

6. *Origins*, vol. 14, n. 43 (April 11, 1985) 712.

7. Closing Message of Vatican II, *AAS* 58 (1966) 18.

In placing this pastoral objective before you, I do not make vocational recruitment its motivation but, at the same time, I suspect that if we work generously with the young they will be drawn to be servants of the poor.

But let me also add an explicit word about vocations. Let your joy, your care for one another, your faith-filled lives, your service of the poor proclaim to young women the richness of your vocation. Encourage them. It is not easy for young people today to make permanent commitments. Say to them how deep God's love is and how good it is to share it with the poor.

4. That each province develop concrete models for community living.

You are a community *for the mission*. I am convinced that the quality of community living affects the quality of pastoral service to others. The gospels tell us that there is no greater sign of the presence of Christ in the world than a vibrant love for one another. The rule of Saint Vincent⁸ and your present Constitutions speak of the affection you should have for one another.⁹

My concern is this. In recent years, it seems to me, we have been able to find a considerable number of renewed, creative ways of serving the poor. But, along with many other Communities, we have had much difficulty in finding ways of significantly renewing community living.

Many of the practices and structures that gave shape to community living in an earlier era have disappeared. In almost all cases, we could surely not now return to those same structures. Most of them served their purpose in their own time, but gradually became over-formalized, inflexible, and out-dated. Still, they often aimed at values that have abiding validity: unity with one another, common vision and energy in the apostolate, prayer, *revision de vie*, penance and conversion. With the passing away of former practices, however, we have unfortunately not yet come up with sufficient contemporary means for forming "New Communities."

Having visited, at one time or another, all of the continents, I see that it is quite difficult to envision a single model of community living.

One of the principal means that your Constitutions envision toward the building up of a living community is the local community plan.¹⁰ This plan is, in a sense, a covenant entered into by the members of the local community,

8. *Rules of the Daughters of Charity* V, 1.

9. *Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity* 2.17.

10. *Ibid.*, 3.46.

by which they pledge to work toward certain common goals and engage in certain common practices. It is to include all aspects of community living and to be evaluated and revised periodically.¹¹ The Constitutions leave considerable flexibility to the local community for fleshing this plan out.

I encourage each of the provinces, and each of the Visitatrixes, to work creatively at evolving models for local community plans. These models should be flexible and demanding at the same time. I say *flexible*, because they will vary from culture to culture and place to place. But I say *demanding* because we commit ourselves to living together. In speaking with married couples, we often encourage them to be with their children, to eat with them, to instruct them, to recreate with them, to listen to them. We may even warn them that, if they neglect to do so, their bonds with the children will eventually be strained and broken. Analogously, if we neglect our Sisters in community, if we fail to be present to them, if we fail to share with them the key elements that constitute our life together (our apostolic mission, our prayer, our attentiveness to mutual listening and service), the bonds of our union will gradually be dissolved.

Working up good models of community living is a demanding objective. It will require creativity and discipline (two qualities that are not easily married!).

5. That the Company will continue to emphasize and find creative means for integral formation on both initial and ongoing levels.

Such integral formation would have various aspects: human, spiritual, apostolic, Vincentian, biblical, theological, professional. On all levels, the person herself will be seen as the one primarily responsible for her own formation.

I encourage you to be especially attentive to the formation of Sisters in the early years after the seminary. Bring them together often. Help them build a deep spiritual foundation, a rootedness in God. It is only in this way that they will be fully alive and persevering in the service of the poor.

6. I would hope that the Company could develop prayer forms which are "something beautiful for God" and attractive to the young.

I would like to see the following principles guide the preparation and the practice of your daily prayer:

11. *Statutes of the Daughters of Charity* 57.

- a. it should be beautiful
- b. it should be simple
- c. it should be attuned to the prayer of the Church
- d. it should be flavored by the tradition of the Company
- e. it should be flexible (adaptable to various situations).

Could each province and each house work at creating a daily common prayer that has these characteristics?

7. I hope that the sick poor will always have a privileged place in the mission of the Company and in each of its provinces.

The sick poor are often the poorest of the poor, and today with maladies like AIDS, the most abandoned. I ask you to remember this: The mission of the Daughter of Charity is intimately bound up with the sick poor. Of course, over the centuries the charity of Christ drove the Daughters to serve many others in distress, but the foundational inspiration of the first Daughters of Charity was to give their whole lives in the service of the sick poor. Marguerite Naseau was the model Saint Vincent held up before the Company. She lived and died for the sick poor, because in 1633, at the age of 39, after having placed in her own bed a patient afflicted with plague, she succumbed to the plague herself. Saint Vincent loved to tell the story of this first Daughter of Charity. She inspired hundreds of thousands of others who would follow in her footsteps.

The original approbation of the Company, dated November 20, 1646, and signed by the Archbishop of Paris, reinforces this focus on the sick poor: "God has inspired [these young women] to dedicate themselves to the service of the sick poor."¹² The original statutes of the Company say the very same thing: This small group, which Saint Vincent de Paul originally envisioned as a parish sodality and which later was to become an enormous community, are called "servants of the sick poor."¹³

8. I hope that every Daughter of Charity will give primacy to these words of Saint Vincent: "The Daughter of Charity is a Daughter of God."

Your name is Daughter of Charity. It means Daughter of God, Saint Vincent said, because God is charity.¹⁴ Never forget that name. Seek to

12. *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines*, présentation par Soeur Elisabeth Charpy (Paris, 1989) 440.

13. *Ibid.*, 441.

14. Cf. SV IX 14, 27, 59, 143, 149, 153, 210, 227, 435; X 128, 490, 501.

be well-informed, skilled nurses, teachers, administrators. But be known also as someone who brings God's peace into the room of the sick person, and deep faith and understanding into the meetings of the parish. Remember that it is only because of your love that the poor will recognize you for who you are. Let the poor sense in you the presence of God, as they did in Saint Louise. In the end, let them be able to say of you: "She walked with God. She was a true Daughter of Charity."

Those are my hopes, my sisters. I ask you to join with me in making them a reality.

Simplicity in the Life of the Daughter of Charity¹

For Vincent de Paul, simplicity, humility, and charity constitute the spirit of the Daughters of Charity (SV IX, 594-95).

The word *spirit*, of course, means *life*. These three virtues are so important that without them a Daughter of Charity is "dead." Even if she is a dogged worker on behalf of the poor, even if she is a tireless organizer of service programs—if she lacks these three virtues, Saint Vincent would say, she is not a Daughter of Charity.

I will divide this chapter into three parts: 1) a brief study of simplicity as understood by Saint Vincent; 2) a description of a horizon-shift that has taken place in theology and spirituality between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries and that affects our way of viewing simplicity today; 3) an attempt at retrieving simplicity in contemporary forms.

Simplicity as Understood by Saint Vincent²

For Saint Vincent, simplicity is first of all, speaking the truth (CR II, 4; XII, 172). It is saying things as they are (SV I, 144), without concealing or hiding anything (SV I, 284; V, 464). He expresses this in a letter to François du Coudray on November 6, 1634:

You know that your own kind heart has given me, thanks be to God, full liberty to speak to you with the utmost confidence, without any concealment or disguise; and it seems to me that up to the present you have recognized that fact in all my

1. Talk to the Daughters of Charity at the Motherhouse in Paris, August 15, 1993.

2. For some interesting information on this same subject, as well as further bibliography, the reader may wish to consult: J.-P. Renouard, "L'Esprit de la Congrégation: Les Vertus Fondamentales," *Vincentiana* XXVIII (1984) 599-615; cf. also T. Davitt, "The Five Characteristic Virtues," *Colloque XIV* (Autumn 1986) 109-120; A. Orcajo, *El Seguimiento de Jesús según Vicente de Paúl* (Caracas, 1988) 174-228. Cf. also Christian Sens, "Comme Prêtre Missionnaire," in *Monsieur Vincent, Témoin de L'Evangile* (Toulouse, 1990) 133-151, esp. 140f.

dealings with you. My God! Am I to fall into the misfortune of being forced to do or to say in my dealings with you anything contrary to holy simplicity? Oh! Sir! May God preserve me from doing so in regard to anything whatsoever! It is the virtue I love most, the one to which in all my actions I pay most heed, so it seems to me; and if it were lawful to say so, the one, I may say, in which I have, by God's mercy, made some progress. (SV I, 284)

The heart must not think one thing while the mouth says another (SV IX, 81; IX, 605; XII, 172). Missionaries and Daughters of Charity must avoid all duplicity, dissimulation, cunning, and double meaning (SV II, 340; IX, 81).

For myself, I don't know, but God gives me such a great esteem for simplicity that I call it my gospel. I have a particular devotion and consolation in saying things as they are. (SV IX, 606)

Simplicity also consists in referring things to God alone (CR II, 4), or purity of intention (SV XII, 172). In this sense simplicity is doing everything for love of God and for no other end (SV XII, 174; XII, 302; II, 315). It entails avoiding "human respect" (SV II, 340), or doing things merely to look good in the eyes of others.

Simplicity involves an unadorned lifestyle. We fail against simplicity, Saint Vincent tells us, when our rooms are filled with superfluous furniture, pictures, large numbers of books, and vain and useless things (SV XII, 175). We must use with great simplicity the things that have been given to us (SV IX, 607).

Simplicity also entails explaining the gospel by familiar comparisons (SV XI, 50). When he speaks to the Daughters of Charity, he uses the Little Method that was employed in the Congregation of the Mission at that time (CR XII, 5). Preaching about a virtue, for example, he might present:

- motives for living it,
- its nature or definition, and
- means for putting it into practice. (SV XI, 260)

e. In Saint Vincent's mind, simplicity is very closely linked with humility (SV I, 144) and it is inseparable from prudence (CR II, 5), which for him means always basing one's judgment on the evangelical maxims

or on the judgments of Jesus Christ (SV XII, 169, 176). Both prudence and simplicity tend toward the same goal: to speak and to act well (SV XII, 176).

*A Significant Horizon Shift*³

Perspective makes a huge difference. Much depends on where we stand. My view of Paris is altogether different from the top of the Eiffel Tower than it is from the bottom of a metro station. It is the same with theology and spirituality. Our horizons change from one era to another, and they affect our way of seeing God and seeing the world.

Horizon shifts, whether we react to them favorably or unfavorably, necessarily have an impact on the way we see all reality. They bring with them gains and losses, as we interpret life, people, truth and events from a changed historical perspective. Practices that seemed apt in one era may seem quaint in another, because our way of viewing them has changed quite dramatically. So it is with the three virtues that constitute the spirit of the Daughters of Charity. Putting this in traditional language, we might say that the challenge is to find the substance of each of the virtues, to put aside those concrete ("accidental") forms that are no longer appropriate for mediating that substance in the modern world, and to find contemporary forms which will embody it more readily.

Of course, not all practices of a previous era are irrelevant today; in fact, many that Saint Vincent suggested are still suitable means for expressing the values he sought. Yet just as many languages cease to exist as a living word capable of communicating meaning, so also some of the practices that were once suitable vehicles for expressing values in Saint Vincent's time are no longer capable of doing so now. In those cases, the challenge is to find or create new forms that will do the job.

A significant shift which has taken place between Saint Vincent's time and ours is that change has come to find a greater place in our expectations. People today are willing to accept fewer absolutes. They question absolute prohibitions which were formerly accepted. They emphasize that changing circumstances make one case different from another.

3. For a treatment of the nature and importance of horizon-shifts, cf. my articles entitled "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today," *Vincentiana* XXIX (1985) 226-54; "The Four Vincentian Vows: Yesterday and Today," *Vincentiana* XXXIV (1990) 230-307.

Another has been increasing pluralism. Contemporary thinkers recognize the value of different cultures, philosophies, and theologies. The inductive scientific method emphasizes the *search for truth*, whereas formerly a more philosophical method emphasized the *possession of truth*. An obvious sign of this in ecclesial matters is the ecumenical movement.

This way of viewing truth also has implications in regard to the virtue of simplicity.

Simplicity Today

In some ways simplicity is not difficult to retrieve today. The virtue which Saint Vincent loved most, his “gospel,” so to speak, still appeals. In a contemporary context described above, it can take many forms, some of which are suggested below.

a. *Speaking the truth.* Simplicity today, as in Saint Vincent’s time, means saying things as they are.

Truth is a keystone concept. Truth is the foundation of trust, which is the basis of all human relations; falsehood, on the other hand, violates trust and makes genuine human relationships impossible.

But experience proves that it is very difficult to let our *yes* mean *yes* and our *no* mean *no*, as Jesus puts it (Mt 5:37; cf. Jas 5:12; 2 Cor 1:17-20). It is precisely because Jesus speaks the truth that his enemies give him no credence (Jn 8:44). Ultimately, he dies for the truth.

On the other hand, as Saint Vincent reminds us, there is a great attractiveness about those who speak the truth. We sense spontaneously that they have nothing to conceal, that they have no hidden agendas. They are truly free. Consequently, it is easy to relate to them.

Yet speaking the truth with consistency is an extremely difficult discipline. We are tempted to blur the truth when our own convenience is at stake or when the truth is embarrassing to us personally. It is also difficult to be true to one’s word, one’s promises, one’s commitments. When we make a statement in the present, it is either true or false right then and there. When we make a commitment for the future, however, it is true only to the extent that we keep it true. Truth, in this sense, is fidelity. It is in this sense especially that Jesus is true to us. He promises to be, and is with us always, even to the end. It is in this same sense that we are

called to be true to vows, to friendships, to our concrete commitments to serve.

Speaking the truth is especially important in the relationship we call "spiritual direction." We choose a "soul friend" so that, with his or her help, we might grow in the Lord's life and in discerning those things which promote his kingdom. It is imperative, therefore, that this relationship be characterized by free self-disclosure and by the avoidance of "hidden corners" in our lives. No one is an island. We need others to mirror back to us what is happening or not happening in our journey toward the Lord. The quality of such relationships in spiritual direction will depend largely upon the simplicity with which we disclose ourselves.

b. *Witnessing to the truth.* This understanding of simplicity is most relevant. People spontaneously admire those who live out what they believe and say. A very comprehensive survey in regard to priests and ministers has disclosed that the quality people most seek in ministers is genuineness, authenticity.⁴

In an era when so many young people have lost confidence in civil and religious authorities because of corruption and proved duplicity (e.g., the political scandals in Italy, Spain, France, England, the United States, and so many other countries), those whose lives match their words speak more powerfully than ever. Speaking and witnessing to the truth are central Christian values, especially in John's gospel. Jesus is the truth (Jn 4:6). The person who acts in the truth comes into the light (Jn 3:21). When the Spirit comes, he will guide us to all truth (Jn 16:13). It is the truth that sets us free (Jn 8:32). The reason why Jesus has come is to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). Anyone who is of the truth hears his voice (Jn 18:37).

This type of simplicity is also extremely attractive in the modern world. Young people love those who are "real," "genuine." These are contemporary names for simplicity.

c. *Seeking the truth.* Being "real" or genuine today, as is evident from the horizon-shift described above, may often demand our admission that we are groping to find the truth, that we are uncertain as to the truth, or that there are complementary truths. This is all the more necessary in a world where it is not longer possible to have universal knowledge.

We are conscious today of being wayfarers. Life is a journey, an

4. Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, *Readiness for Ministry* (Vandalia, 1975-76).

ongoing process. So it is also with the quest for truth. We grasp the truth gradually. It is not captured in a single insight. Our verbal attempts at expressing it are always limited, perfectible. Nor is it possessed once for all. It is constructed bit by bit. The deeper we descend into the well, the deeper we know the well to be. So we must be dedicated to seeking, pursuing, finding the truth. This virtue, which Bernard Häring calls "dedication to the truth," takes the form of listening well, meeting and discussing with others, reading, ongoing education.

d. *Being in the truth.* This is what we might traditionally call simplicity of intention, purity of heart, referring all things to God. It is single-minded devotion to the Lord and his kingdom. In this sense, when the simple person labors, he labors because he loves God and he loves his people. He does not labor in order to be placed in high positions. Nor does he labor because admiration or money may come his way if he takes on extra work. When a simple person recognizes that his motives are mixed, he talks them out and seeks the aid of another to help him discern why he is really doing things. He knows that it is impossible always to have a single intention, but he seeks to make love of God and service of the neighbor the dominant motive in everything. Jesus groped to know his Father's will and struggled with contrary desires as he resolved to do it; the simple person today will necessarily engage in and work through a similar struggle.

As an aid in growing in this type of simplicity it is helpful to survey the competing values in our lives from time to time. Comfort, power, popularity, and financial security can subtly compete with love of God and love of neighbor. Sometimes these secondary motives will coincide with purer motives (as when the people whom we serve admire us and give us lots of positive feedback). But when they conflict, are we willing to sacrifice?

e. *Practicing the truth (in love).* This means performing works of justice and charity, making the truth come alive creatively in the world. It means bringing the truth to completion in deed. It means making our word become flesh, giving the gospels concrete life-form. The truth cannot just be verbal; it must be lived. Commitments to do the works of justice cannot just be spoken; they must be kept, day in and day out. The gospels cannot just be preached; they must be practiced in love.

Simplicity, from this point of view, means that when we preach justice

we must also live justice. When we preach solidarity with the poor, we must also live in solidarity with the poor. When we exhort others to a simple life-style, we must live simply ourselves. When we say that we are celibate, we must live as celibates. When we proclaim the ways of peace-making, we must act as peace-makers.

f. *Integration.* Simplicity in this sense means personal wholeness, the ability to bring together in a unified way the varied aspects of one's life: labor, prayer, community, solitude, leisure. Young people speak of "having it together." Formation literature today often stresses integration as the goal of the whole formation process.

Martin Buber tells a striking story that illustrates the importance of integration:

A hasid of the Rabbi of Lublin once fasted from one Sabbath to the next. On Friday afternoon he began to suffer such cruel thirst that he thought he would die. He saw a well, went up to it, and prepared to drink. But instantly he realized that because of one brief hour he had still to endure, he was about to destroy the work of the entire week. He did not drink and went away from the well. Then he was touched by a feeling of pride for having passed this difficult test. When he became aware of it, he said to himself, "Better I go and drink than let my heart fall prey to pride." He went back to the well, but just as he was going to bend down to draw water, he noticed that his thirst had disappeared. When the Sabbath had begun, he entered his teacher's house. "Patchwork!" the rabbi called to him, as he crossed the threshold.⁵

The truly simple person arrives at "being a united soul." His life is no longer "patchwork," but is "all of a piece." Love of God and love of neighbor come together in a single whole.

g. *Simplicity of life.* As in Saint Vincent's time, simplicity today also has implications in regard to life-style. Some contemporary writers even prefer to use the terminology "simplicity of life" to "poverty" when speaking of the content of our vow. Regardless of the terminology, our commitment to community for the service of the poor necessarily in-

5. Martin Buber, "Resolution," in *The Way of Man According to the Teaching of the Hasidism* 21.

volves a commitment to a simple life-style, in which we share, at least in some ways, in the experience of those in need.

But such simplicity of life must not be confused, as sometimes happens, with drabness or lack of beauty (or worse, with lack of cleanliness!). On the contrary, simplicity implies beauty and enhances it. Simplicity is one of the characteristics of genuine art. Masterpieces of painting, sculpture, design, and music, even when quite complex, maintain a radical simplicity that lies at the heart of their beauty. Consequently, it is important to foster a sense of "the beautiful" in our lives. Especially the places and the forms of our prayer (singing, methods of reciting the psalms, images, etc.), while simple, should be "something beautiful for God."

Humility in the Life of the Daughter of Charity¹

Humility, along with simplicity and charity, is one of the virtues that constitute the spirit of the Daughters of Charity.

This chapter will be divided into three parts: 1) a brief study of humility as understood by Saint Vincent; 2) a description of a horizon-shift that has taken place in theology and spirituality between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries and that affects our way of viewing humility today; 3) an attempt at retrieving humility in contemporary forms.

Humility as Understood by Saint Vincent

For Saint Vincent, humility is the recognition that all good comes from God. He writes to Firmin Get on March 8, 1658: "Let us no longer say: it is I who have done this good work; for every good thing ought to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (SV VII, 98-99). "Be very much on your guard against attributing anything to yourself. By doing so you would commit robbery and do injury to God, who alone is the author of every good thing," he writes to Jacques Pesnelle on October 15, 1658 (SV VII, 289). God pours out his abundant gifts on the humble "who recognize that all good which is done by them comes from God" (SV I, 182).

Our sins too should help us grow in humility (SV XI, 397). Humility is recognition of our own lowliness and faults (CR II, 7), accompanied by exuberant confidence in God (SV III, 279; V, 165; II, 233, 336; X, 201; IX, 382). In writing to Charles Nacquart on March 22, 1648, about the gift of vocation, he states: "Humility alone is capable of receiving this grace. A perfect abandonment of everything that you are and can be in the exuberant confidence in your sovereign creator ought to follow" (SV III, 279).

Humility involves voluntary self-emptying (SV V, 534; XI, 61, 312; XII,

1. Talk to the Daughters of Charity at the Motherhouse in Paris, January 1, 1994.

200). This entails loving to be unknown and abandoned (SV VII, 312; X, 129, 152; XII, 709). It means avoiding the applause of the world (SV I, 496; IX, 605; X, 148). It involves taking the last place (SV IX, 605) and loving the hidden life (SV IX, 680).

Humility involves esteeming others as more worthy than yourself (SV V, 37; IX, 303). In this regard, it is a communal virtue, not just an individual one. We are to regard the Company as the least of all (SV IX, 303; X, 200; XI, 60, 114-15, 434; XII, 438).

Saint Vincent gives numerous motives for the practice of humility:

- * He notes that Jesus was humble and happy to be seen as the least of men. (SV I, 182, 534; XI, 400)
- * It is the characteristic virtue of Jesus (SV XI, 400), and should be the characteristic virtue of a true Daughter of Charity. (SV X, 527)
- * The saints too were humble: "It is the virtue of Jesus Christ, the virtue of his holy mother, the virtue of the greatest of the saints." (SV XI, 56-57)
- * God blesses humble beginnings. (SV II, 281; V, 487)
- * "Humility is the origin of all the good that we do." (SV IX, 674)
- * God has called us, lowly people, to do great things. (SV X, 128, 198)
- * It is the arms by which we conquer the devil (SV I, 536; XI, 312), since the devil and pride are the same. (SV IX, 706)
- * We cannot persevere without humility. (SV I, 528; X, 528; XII, 304)
- * It brings all other virtues with it. (SV XII, 210)
- * It is the foundation of all evangelical perfection, the node of the whole spiritual life. (CR II, 7)
- * Everyone loves it (SV XII, 197), but it is easier to think about than to practice. (SV XI, 54)
- * It is the source of peace and union. (SV XII, 106, 210)
- * If the Company possesses humility, it will be a paradise:

“If you establish yourselves in it, what will happen? You will make of this company a paradise and people will likely say that it is a group of the happiest people on earth.” (SV X, 439)

- * Heaven is won by humility. (CR II, 6)

Saint Vincent suggested many means for acquiring humility:

- * We should do acts of humility daily. (SV IX, 680; XII, 716; I, 183)
- * We should confess our faults openly (SV V, 164; XI, 54) and accept the admonitions of others. (CR X 13-14)
- * We should desire to be admonished. (SV IX, 382)
- * We should pray to our Lord and the Blessed Mother as models of humility. (SV IX, 680; XI, 56-57)
- * We should believe that we are the worst in the world. (SV X, 552)
- * We should recognize that everyone has his faults; then there will be little trouble excusing others. (SV X, 438)
- * We should preach Jesus Christ and not ourselves. (SV XII, 22)
- * Superiors should so act that others will not be able to tell that they are superiors. (SV XI, 346; IX, 302)

A Significant Horizon Shift: A More Positive Attitude Toward Creation and Less Emphasis on Sin

The struggle with Jansenism greatly influenced seventeenth-century thinking. Theologians and spiritual writers, while combatting Jansenism, were influenced by many of its presuppositions. It was “in the air they breathed,” so to speak. Like Manicheanism and Albigensianism, two of its predecessors, it had a very negative view of created reality. It was overly rigorous and focused on sin. The twentieth century has brought a renewed emphasis on the dignity of the human person and on the goodness of creation. This is particularly evident in *Gaudium et Spes* (9,

12, 22) and the writings of John Paul II.² Theologians and spiritual writers take a much more positive attitude toward "the human." The human person is seen as the center of creation. Created realities are extensions of his being and ways in which he celebrates and shares God's gifts.

The shadow side of this horizon-shift is that it has brought with it a deepening loss of the sense of sin. Consequently, among young people especially, there is a diminished consciousness of the need for mortification and penance. The twentieth century has witnessed increased sexual permissiveness in society and a weakening of family structures. In some parts of the world, one out of two marriages ends in divorce. The number of single-parent families is huge. In some cities more than half the children are born out of wedlock. Abortion is widespread.

Both the bright and the shadow side of this horizon-shift have implications for the virtue of humility.

Humility Today

Because of the horizon-shift just mentioned, it is difficult for modern men and women to accept Saint Vincent's language when he speaks about humility. We tend to cringe when he calls himself the worst of all sinners and speaks of his community as the most wretched in the world.

Yet when he emphasizes humility, prescinding from the language in which he speaks, Saint Vincent penetrates a basic, abiding New Testament truth. Luke's gospel, in particular, tells us that God comes to the lowly, the poor of Israel, those who recognize their need for him and long for him. In this sense, humility is "the foundation of all evangelical perfection, the node of the whole spiritual life" (CR II, 7). In this sense too, Saint Vincent went to the core of the gospels when he said that "humility is the origin of all the good that we do" (SV IX, 674).

Moving beyond Saint Vincent's language and a rhetoric that was characteristic of the seventeenth century, it is important to articulate an understanding of humility and the contemporary forms that it takes.

a. Humility is a recognition of our creatureliness and our redeemedness, both being gifts of God's love.

2. Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, *passim*.

We are completely dependent upon the Lord. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

There is nothing that we have not received. "Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). Whatever we are, whatever we do, whatever we possess comes from the Lord.

We are also very much dependent on others. The modern age is increasingly conscious of the interdependence of all men and women. The humble person recognizes interdependence both as a sign of his limitedness and as a source of enrichment. We need others and cannot do without them. In solidarity with them, we journey toward the kingdom.

Besides being created beings, we are sinners who have been redeemed through God's gracious love. "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. All are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24).

Perhaps as a distorted reaction to an overemphasis on sin in the past, the modern age has difficulty sustaining a sense of sin. Yet sin, if we are alert to it, shows itself in numerous different ways in our lives: in our prejudices, in our tendency to categorize other people indiscriminately, in our speaking lightly about others' negative points, in our slowness to pray, in our inability to get excited about gospel values, in our selectivity in reading the gospels, in our unwillingness to share what we have with the poor, in our hesitancy to divest ourselves of power and to stand with the needy in their misery, in our compliance with unjust social structures. In face of all this, the Lord forgives us eagerly and gives us life in Christ Jesus. It is not by the works we do that we are saved, but rather by the gift of God in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal 2:21-22). Otherwise grace is not grace (Rom 11:6).

b. Humility is gratitude for gifts. In the New Testament, gratitude is the opposite side of the coin from humility. The person who has received all stands before the Lord in a spirit of thanksgiving. In this sense, thanksgiving is the central Christian attitude, which we daily celebrate as eucharist.

Mary epitomizes this attitude in Luke's gospel:

My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord.
My spirit finds joy in God my Savior
for he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness.

All ages to come shall call me blessed.
God who is mighty has done great things for me.
Holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age on those who fear him.

(Luke 1:46-50)

Mary cries out in praise and thanksgiving for the many gifts that God has given her. She recognizes God's gifts, without diminishing or denying them, and responds with gratitude. In this she echoes the psalmist: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods for his loving kindness endures forever" (Ps 136:1-3).

This type of gratitude characterizes the poor. Henri Nouwen writes:

Many poor people live in such close relationship with the many rhythms of nature that all the goods that come to them are experienced as free gifts of God. Children and friends, bread and wine, music and pictures, trees and flowers, water and life, a house, a room with just one bed, all are gifts to be grateful for and celebrated. This basic sense I have come to know. I am always surrounded by words of thanks, "Thanks for your visit, your blessing, your sermon, your prayer, your gifts, your presence with us." Even the smallest and most necessary goods are a reason for gratitude. This all-pervading gratitude is the basis for celebration. The poor not only are grateful for life, they also celebrate life constantly.³

Today those responsible for formation know the importance of an awareness of one's gifts as part of a positive self-image. But, almost in spite of the horizon-shift described above, the problem of negative self-image, which has nothing to do with genuine humility, remains a persistent one.

Recognizing that all is gift, the humble person will be eager to avoid comparisons. He or she will receive life with gratitude, leaving judgment to the Lord, as the gospels frequently exhort us to do (cf. Mt 7:1-5). Pride

3. Henri Nouwen, "Humility," in *America* (December 11, 1982) 372; cf. H. Nouwen, *Gracias* (San Francisco, 1983) 146-47.

loves comparison. The avaricious person may be satisfied when he possesses much; the proud person remains restless as long as anyone else has more. Humility spurns comparison. It can focus on the good in others, just as in oneself, and thank the Lord for it.

c. Humility involves a servant's attitude. This is central in the New Testament, especially for those who exercise authority. "If anyone wishes to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all" (Mk 9:35). In John's gospel Jesus demonstrates this for his disciples through a parable in action when he washes their feet.

Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as "teacher" and "Lord," and fittingly enough for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet—I your teacher and Lord—then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done so you must do. (Jn 13:12-15)

We are called, like Jesus, "not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28). The expectation of the Church in the modern world is that authority figures will be collegial, dialogic, humble servants. An ancient Christian baptismal hymn captures this insight into Jesus and applies it to his followers:

Your attitude must be that of Christ. Though he was in the form of God he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross. Because of this God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ is Lord! (Phil 2:5-11)

As servants, we must be willing to do humble things. Today, leadership tasks that were once prestigious, like administration, may truly be humble tasks, exposing the servant-leader to much criticism while engaging her in many meetings and humdrum paper work that bring little positive feedback.

d. Humility also entails allowing ourselves to be evangelized by the poor ("our lords and masters" as Saint Vincent liked to call them). This insight, already present in the early Church and echoed later by Saint Vincent, receives great emphasis in Latin American theology and in an ecclesiology "from below."

Not only do we as ministers teach others, we must allow them to teach us. As Augustine put it, there are seeds of the Word everywhere and in everyone.⁴ Only the humble can discern them. We must hear God speaking to us as we see the willingness of the poor to share the little that they have, as we see their gratitude to God for the simple gifts that he gives them, as we see their hoping against hope that God will provide, as we see their reverence and care and respect for us as well as for God. The poor will preach to us eloquently if we allow them.

As you can see, my sisters, humility is utterly fundamental for Saint Vincent. It is the foundation of all evangelical perfection; it is the node of the whole spiritual life (CR II, 7). He says with great clarity: "Humility—let it be your password!" (SV XII, 206).

4. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53.

Charity in the Life of the Daughter of Charity¹

Saint Vincent describes the spirit of the Company very clearly (SV IX, 594-95):

The spirit of your Company consists of three things: to love our Lord and to serve him in a spirit of humility and simplicity. As long as charity, humility and simplicity exist among you, it may be said that the Company is still alive.

Your Constitutions say the very same thing when they speak about the spirit of the Daughters of Charity: "The Evangelical virtues of humility, simplicity and charity are the path along which the Daughters of Charity should allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit."²

I have already reflected with you on simplicity and humility. Today, let us focus on charity.

Charity: Developing a "Filial Relationship with the Father and Love for Our Neighbor"

Jesus' psychology, Saint Vincent writes in one of his letters, is caught up in two all-consuming directions, "his filial relationship with the Father and his charity toward the neighbor" (SV VI, 393).³

1. A filial relationship with the Father and docility to his providence.

"Let us give ourselves to God," Saint Vincent says repeatedly to the Daughters of Charity, as well as to the Vincentians (cf. SV IX, 26, 534, 592; X, 513; XII, 323, 354). He has deep confidence in God as his Father, into whose hands he can place himself and his works. The journal written

1. Talk to the Daughters of Charity at the Motherhouse in Paris, January 1, 1995.

2. *Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity*, 1.10

3. The French reads: "... religion vers son Père."

by Jean Gicquel recounts how Vincent told Frs. Alméras, Berthe and Gicquel, on June 7, 1660, just four months before his death: "To be consumed for God, to have no goods nor power except for the purpose of consuming them for God. That is what our Savior did himself, who was consumed for love of his Father" (SV XIII, 179).

Saint Vincent wanted love for God to be all-embracing. He writes to Pierre Escart: "I greatly hope we may set about stripping ourselves entirely of affection for anything that is not God, be attached to things only for God and according to God, and that we may seek and establish his kingdom first of all in ourselves, and then in others. That is what I entreat you to ask of him for me" (SV II, 106).

Because God loves us deeply as a Father, he exercises a continual providence in our lives. In a letter to Bernard Codoing, Saint Vincent states: "The rest will come in its time. Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the providence of God and be very careful not to run ahead of it. If it pleases God to give me some consolation in our vocation it is this: that I think, so it seems to me, that we have tried to follow his great providence in everything" (SV II, 453). Likewise he writes to Saint Louise de Marillac: "My God, my daughter, what great hidden treasures there are in holy providence and how marvelously our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not kick against it!" (SV I, 68; cf. III, 197).

Saint Vincent's teaching on providence rests on two foundation-stones: 1) deep confidence in God as a loving Father; 2) "indifference," that is, "willing only what he wills" (SV V, 402).

One senses in this focus on providence a distinctively Lucan emphasis.⁴ The Spirit of God is active from the beginning in Luke, guiding the course of history. He anoints Jesus with power from on high and directs him and his disciples in their ministry.⁵

* The Holy Spirit will come down on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. (Lk 1:35)

* Having received baptism . . . the Holy Spirit descended on him. (Lk 3:22)

4. Cf. J. Shultz, "Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentische Wissenschaft* 54 (1963), 104-16.

5. The Book of Acts continues this theme of the "Gospel of the Holy Spirit". There are fifty-seven references to the Spirit in Acts; cf. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* 227.

- * Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit . . . was led by the Spirit into the desert. (Lk 4:1)
- * Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Holy Spirit. (Lk 4:14)
- * The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. (Lk 4:18)
- * Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. (Lk 10:21)
- * Your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. (Lk 11:13)
- * Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (Lk 12:10)
- * The Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say. (Lk 12:12)

Trust in providence is confidence in a loving Father. It shows itself in the ability to see beyond particular events to a larger picture, in patient waiting, in perseverance. But providence is also honored, as Saint Vincent pointed out, by using the means that God places at our disposal for accomplishing his goals.⁶ If someone should be tempted to interpret Saint Vincent's teaching on providence too passively, she might recall the founder's words to Edme Jolly (SV VII, 310): "You are one of the few who honor the providence of God very much by the preparation of remedies against foreseen evils. I thank you very humbly for this and pray that our Lord will continue to enlighten you more and more so that such enlightenment may spread through the Company."

Love for Christ in the person of the poor.⁷

While the Christ of Saint Vincent is "Lord" and "Son of God," he lives in the person of the poor. He continues to suffer in them (SV X, 680).

He says to the Daughters of Charity on February 13, 1646: "In serving the poor, you serve Jesus Christ. O my Daughters, how true that is! You serve Christ in the person of the poor. That is as true as the fact that we are here" (SV IX, 252; cf. X, 123). He frequently cites Matthew 25:31-46

6. SV V, 396: "Let us wait patiently, but let us act, and, as it were, let us make haste slowly."

7. On this same theme, cf. José-Maria Ibañez, "Le Pauvre, Icône de Jésus-Christ," in *Monsieur Vincent, Témoin de L'Evangile* (Toulouse, 1990) 155-68.

to reinforce the identification of Jesus with the poor:⁸ "So this is what obliges you to serve them with respect, as your masters, and with devotion: that they represent for you the person of our Lord, who said: 'Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my brethren, I will consider it as done to me' " (SV X, 332).⁹

Because of this identification with Christ, the poor are "our lords and masters" (cf. SV IX, 119; X, 332). In drafting the rule for the Daughters, he writes that they should "love one another deeply, as sisters whom he has joined together with the bond of his love, and they should cherish the poor as their masters, since our Lord is in them, and they in Our Lord" (SV XIII, 540). He repeats the same theme to the priests and the brothers of the Mission: "Let us go then, my brothers, and work with a new love in the service of the poor looking even for the poorest and the most abandoned, recognizing before God that they are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy to render them our small services" (SV XI, 393). The Christ of Vincent, his "lord and master," is therefore to be found in the sick, the prisoner, the galley-slave, the abandoned child, those ravaged by the religious wars of the day (SV X, 680).

Let me briefly mention two characteristics of love of neighbor, as taught by Saint Vincent to the Daughters of Charity.

a. The love of those living in the Vincentian spirit is to be both "affective and effective" (SV IX, 475, 592, 599; XI, 40). Saint Vincent repeats this theme over and over again. "The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender, it is effective, because they serve the poor effectively" (SV IX, 593).

b. They will minister to the poor "spiritually and corporally" (SV IX, 59, 593; XI, 364). This is clear not only in regard to the Daughters of Charity, but it is evident in the mandates that Saint Vincent gives to the various other groups he founded: the Congregation of the Mission, the Confraternities of Charity, and the Ladies of Charity. For Vincent, Jesus comes "to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Lk 4:18). He comes to "save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21; cf. Lk 1:77). The Daughter of Charity, therefore, will tend not only to bodily needs; she will share her faith by her witness and her words. Saint Vincent, more-

8. Cf. SV IX, 252, 324, 454; X, 332; XIII, 788, 790, 806; XII, 88, 100.

9. Cf. also SV X, 679-80.

over, warns the members of the Congregation of the Mission that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms.¹⁰ Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, even the most abandoned (SV XI, 393).

Today, the unity between evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of Saint Vincent's spirit, is one of the linchpins in the Church's social teaching.¹¹

Some Means toward Practical Charity

The emphasis in the Vincentian tradition is on *practical* charity. Saint Vincent puts the accent on *effective* love. It is as if he hears Jesus saying: "When I was hungry, not only did you sympathize with me, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, not only did you look on me with compassion, but you gave me something to drink." From the origins of the Company right up to the present, the world has recognized in the Daughter of Charity a woman of practical, concrete, effective love. It is in this way that she shows herself a daughter of God, who is love. Let me suggest four ways of loving concretely.

1. Accepting the Lord's love

God's love comes first. We give only what we have received.

A number of superiors and those responsible for formation programs today attest that a negative self-image is the root of many of the problems with which members of communities struggle. This being the case, let me suggest that, along with healthy, loving human relationships, acceptance of the Lord's love is a key factor in the self-acceptance that enables us to love maturely. For many, work or achievements unfortunately play a disproportionate role in their feeling valued personally. But in the long

10. SV XII, 87: "If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the gospel to the poor but not to comfort them, to tend to their spiritual needs and not to their temporal needs, I respond that we ought to assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others . . . To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works. . . ."

11. Cf. Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in AAS LXIII (1971) 924: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are integral elements in the preaching of the gospel." Cf. also, *Centesimus Annus*, 5.

run, genuine self-worth rests on a consciousness of the deep personal love of the Lord as Creator and Redeemer.

Meditation on some striking scriptural texts concerning the Lord's personal love for us is a very helpful means of growing in awareness of that love. In his struggles to be faithful, Moses, pleading for light and strength, heard these words from the Lord: "This request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend" (Ex 33:7-17).¹²

2. Labor

Servants get their hands dirty. They labor long and hard. They engage in difficult tasks as nurses, teachers, social workers, administrators. They are on the front lines in ministering to the poor.

In your ministry, as Saint Vincent says, first do and then teach. As a follower of Christ, a servant of the poor, you will touch the hearts of God's people especially when you give vibrant witness:

- through the language of works (cf. SV II, 4): performing the works of justice and mercy which are a sign that the kingdom of God is really alive among us: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, helping to find the causes of their hunger and thirst and the ways of alleviating them;
- through the language of words: announcing with deep conviction the Lord's presence, his love, his offer of forgiveness and acceptance to all;
- through the language of relationships: being *with* the poor, working *with* them, forming a community that shows the Lord's love for all.

3. Creativity

Saint Vincent tells us that "Love is inventive to the point of infinity" (SV XI, 146). I have always admired the Daughters of Charity for your inventiveness. Because you live in daily contact with the poor you will

12. Among many other texts on which it might be helpful to meditate throughout our lives, I would suggest: Dt 1:29-33; 7:7-11; 8:5-10; 11:10-17; 32:10-11; Is 43:1-7; 49:14-16; 54:5-10; 55; Hos 11:1-9; Ps 103; 139; 145; Lk 7:36-50; 12:22-32; 15:11-32; Jn 3:16-17; 14:14-28; Eph 1:3-14; Jas 1:17-18; 1 Jn 4:9-10.

be among the first to know their real needs. It will not be I, who am sitting behind a desk or visiting the provinces. It will not be sociologists or economists, who study the needs of the poor by examining the data they receive. You will know ahead of us, because the poor tell you directly. I encourage you to continue to be inventive in the service of the needs that you discover. Ask the question individually and as a Community: What is this poor person asking of me concretely? What is the AIDS patient asking of the Daughter of Charity? What is the handicapped child asking? What is the refugee in a camp asking? What is the sick person in his or her home crying out for? Then be creative in ministering to his or her needs.

4. Perseverance

Love in practice, as Dorothy Day tells us, can be a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams.

It is easy to love for a time. It is difficult to love for life. Permanent commitment is more fragile today than it was in the seventeenth century, especially since many of the societal supports that undergirded it at that time have disappeared. So practical charity shows itself today especially as fidelity. It is gold tested in fire. It finds ways of loving both "in season and out of season." Practical charity adjusts, finding new ways and developing professionally, especially through ongoing formation. In this era of second careers and early retirement, it seeks to learn ways of expressing love for the Lord and love for the poor even in ministries that may be quite different from the ways in which one served in his or her youth. The challenge which persevering and adjusting present today was not unknown to Saint Vincent: "As for myself, in spite of my age, I say before God that I do not feel exempt from the obligation of laboring for the salvation of those poor people, for what could hinder me from doing so? If I cannot preach every day, all right! I will preach twice a week. If I cannot preach more important sermons, I will strive to preach less important ones; and if the people do not hear me, then what is there to prevent me from speaking in a friendly, homely way to those poor folk, as I am now speaking to you, gathering them around me as you are now" (SV XI, 136)?

My sisters, I conclude today with the words of Saint Vincent: "Charity," he tells us, "when it dwells in a soul takes complete possession of

all its powers. It never rests. It is a fire that acts ceaselessly'' (SV XI, 216). The Daughter of Charity is a daughter of love. She has a wonderful vocation. Saint Vincent assures her: ''There is no better way to assure our eternal happiness than to live and die in the service of the poor within the arms of providence and in a real renunciation of ourselves by following Jesus Christ'' (SV III, 392).